

QUAD

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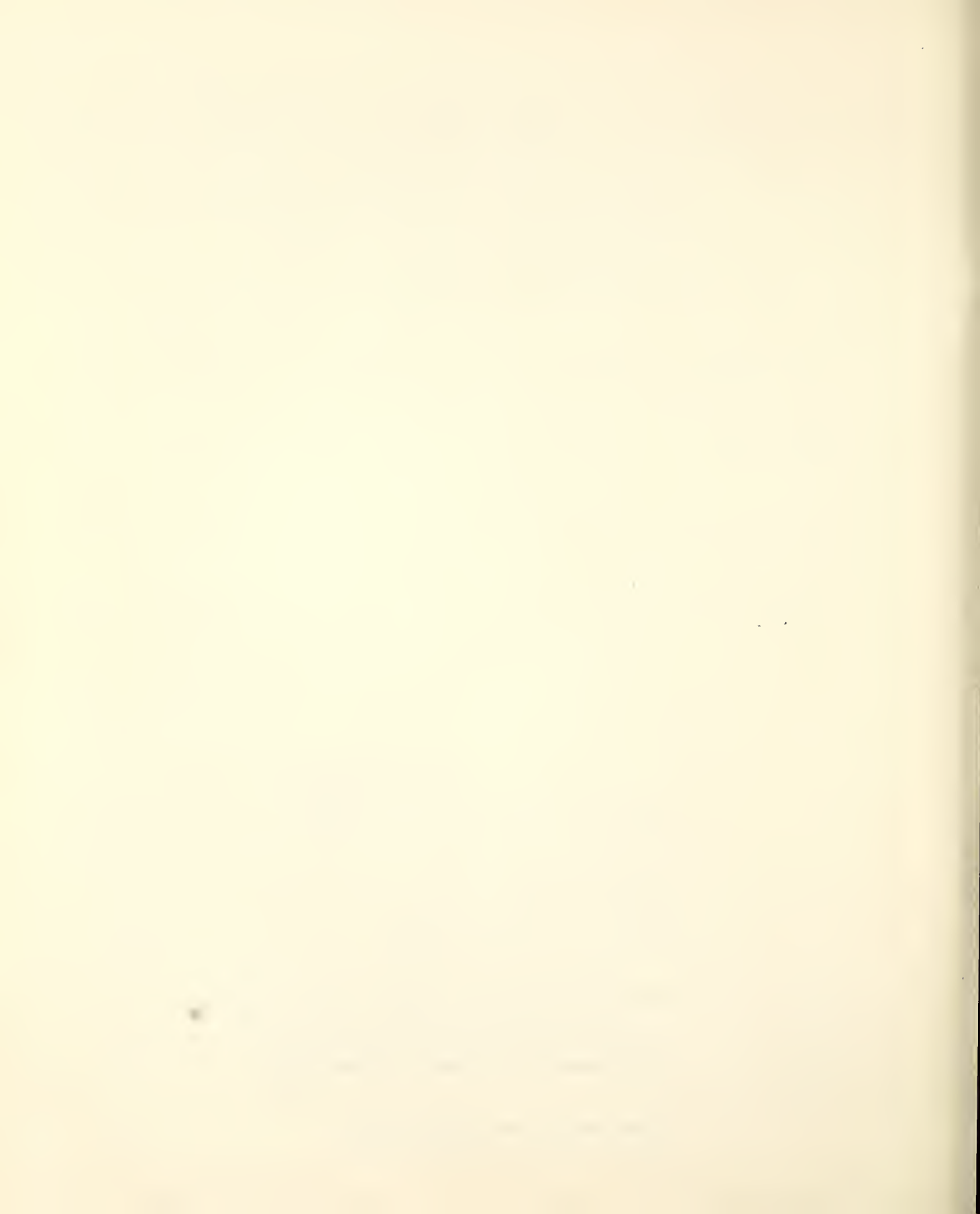
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## AN EXPLORATION OF THE CONTEXT, COMPOSITION, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VAN GOGH'S CROWS OVER THE WHEAT FIELD

Vincent van Gogh spent the last two months of his life, from the latter part of May, 1890, until his suicide in the last part of July, painting in Auvers-sur-Oise, a small village a few miles northwest of Paris. Frank Elgar, a noted art critic, expresses the opinion that the works produced during this final period cannot be placed on the same artistic level as those of van Gogh's earlier glowing period at Arles. It is true that the paintings of this period reflect the growing loneliness, despondency, and inner conflict which Vincent was experiencing during the last days of his life. But it seems that selected paintings, notably the

two portraits of Dr. Gachet and various landscapes showing wheat fields and stormy skies, are powerful artistic accomplishments precisely because of the inner strain, love, and awareness of death which they express.

The painting **Crows over the Wheat Field** or **Corfield with Crows** is one of the last, possibly the very last, of the works which Vincent completed. While it conveys a sober prescience of death, it is also a vibrant comment on life by one who felt and experienced it deeply. Because of its critical date and symbolic nature, this painting conceivably can serve as a culmination point or vantage point

from which to seek an understanding of Vincent's work and to project its significance for the generations of artists who followed. In order to understand the painting and its significance as completely as possible, it is necessary to understand the artist's previous life and painting, and his life at the particular time the work was done. It is also necessary to try to understand the composition and technique of the painting itself, the significance of the painting in terms of the artist's life work, and its significance for painting in general. I have attempted to come to such an understanding of the painting through a study of the last period of Vincent's life and work in books of art history and criticism, in the letters written by Vincent to his brother Theo and other relatives and friends, and in the painting itself.

In order to understand the last period of Vincent's life, which culminated in **Crows over the Wheat Field**, it is first necessary to have a general comprehension of his previous life and work. The oldest son of a Protestant minister, Vincent was born in Groot Zundert, in the Dutch province of North Brabant, on March 30, 1853. From 1869 to 1875 he was employed by the art dealer, Goupil and worked at branches of the dealership in the Hague, London, and Paris. He was an exemplary employee until he fell in love and was rejected. Plagued by deep melancholy and the resulting loss of mental balance, he began seeking consolation in the Bible and neglecting his employment so that he was consequently dismissed. While teaching languages in Ramsgate, England in 1876, he became aware of the dismal poverty and social misery of the working people. This revelation caused him to reorient his attitude toward society and enter the service of a Methodist pastor in order to express his intense religious love for the poor. Lacking the eloquence to preach, he suffered another defeat at this job, but still full of love and fervor, and haunted by his religious calling, he decided to prepare for a theological career at a school in Amsterdam. Lacking admission requirements and disillusioned with the discrepancies between the teachings and the official practice of Christianity, he had to give up this idea. But he did not relinquish his goal to love and serve people, because he proceeded to attend a school of practical evangelizing in Brussels. From 1879 to 1880 he zealously served and loved the poor workers of the Borinage district

in Holland, but the intensity of his devotion to the miners scandalized the church superiors and frightened the miners to a certain degree, so that his mission was discontinued.

His first drawings seem to date from this period as evidence of the reorientation of his course toward the vocation of painting. From 1880 to 1886 Vincent wandered around Holland and Belgium painting laborers, peasants, and the poor with somber but intense colors. As always, his aims remained obstinately the same: to share with his fellow humans and to communicate to his neighbors his love, passion, and need for truth and consolation. In 1886 he joined his brother Theo who was an art dealer in Paris, and his work began reflecting the influence of Impressionism, the impasto technique of Monticelli, and a knowledge of Japanese prints. Here he assimilated the progressive currents of the time and lightened his art with a new range of colors, without losing his original devotion to humble subjects. In 1888 Vincent left Paris for Arles in the Midi region of southern France. Here he was intoxicated by the sun and the colors of the Midi. He flattened his forms and, inspired by Delacroix, he experimented with the symbolic and autonomous values of color. Under the influence of Gauguin, who shared his small house at Arles, Vincent intensified his color as his most powerful means of expression. Painting remained for him an inspired vocation which he religiously pursued, writing his brother, "I tell you, the more I think it over, the more I feel that there is nothing more artistic than to love people." But Vincent began having seizures which are now attributed to some form of epilepsy or venereal disease. After a crisis in which he quarreled with Gauguin, attempted to kill him, and subsequently cut off his own ear, Vincent knew he needed help and went voluntarily to the Asylum of Saint Paul de Mausole at Saint Remy. During his stay at Saint Remy, Vincent suffered several crises but was allowed to paint. His paintings showed a marked change in technique in that the means of intensity shifted from his Arlesian emphasis of color (although color still remained important) to an emphasis of forms and movement of forms. His brushstrokes came in an explosive and unconstrained torrent, which expressed his continued enthusiasm of love for man and nature, as well as an anguished release of emotion.



Up to this point it seems that the characteristic feature in Vincent's life was a religious involvement with life and an overwhelming and continually insatiated need to share his love with the world. He attempted to express this through evangelical zeal and through artistic zeal, which for him were inseparable and identical. In the latter part of his life his personality increasingly came into conflict with his aims; because his love was so intense it was seldom reciprocated or understood. The last period of his life at Auvers is characterized by the despondency which grew out of the conflict of his personality and ideals, and the paintings he produced reflect this conflict.

On May 20, 1890, after leaving Saint Remy and spending three harmonious days with Theo and his wife in Paris, Vincent arrived in Auvers where he was to remain, except for a few visits to Paris and Arles, until his death two months later. The numerous letters which he wrote are the best index of his daily life, health, state of mind, and attitude toward his work. At first he was relatively calm and greatly relieved to be out of the asylum. Although there were a number of other painters in the village, as well as his newly found friend Dr. Gachet, Vincent wrote his mother that "life might well continue being isolated," but that he could be relatively content because "Painting is something in itself." He worked at an amazing rate, producing at least one, and sometimes two canvases a day, as well as numerous drawings, some of which he enclosed in his letters. He wrote his mother, ". . . at times I exert myself to the utmost, though it happens to be this very work that is least understood. . . . for me it is the only link between the past and present." As Vincent gradually got to know Dr. Gachet, who often invited him to dinner, he increasingly liked this man who had a great interest in art, owned many canvases, and had known several famous artists. In early June Vincent did a portrait of the doctor and was overjoyed to find that Gachet greatly admired the portrait and requested a copy for himself. On June 4, Vincent wrote Theo excitedly about the rare experience of having someone admire and understand his painting. Under Gachet's influence Vincent became increasingly optimistic about his health. He felt that his continued attacks at Saint Remy had largely been the result of the influence of the other patients, and he wrote Theo, "I still think that it is mostly a

disease of the South that I have caught and that returning here will be enough to dissipate the whole thing." He later confided that his nightmares had ceased to a great extent. In early June he also wrote his mother that the symptoms of the disease, which served as "a sort of thermometer" to his outward condition, had quite disappeared.

Vincent continued to be relatively cheerful until the end of June when he began to worry about the burden he was placing on Theo, who continued to support him although he himself was suffering increasing financial difficulties and bad health and had a wife and baby who both became seriously ill. In his letter of June 30, Vincent first mentioned to Theo a fear that his disease could possibly return. He had not had an attack since the last one at Saint Remy five months before, and it is obvious that under the pressure of worry and guilt he feared that the disease might return to follow him forever and drive him insane. In subsequent letters he continued to express his concern about Theo's wife, Jo, and the baby who was his namesake. He was evidently aware of his growing instability, because he wrote to Theo of his anxiety for his nephew saying, ". . . since you were good enough to call him after me, I should like him to have a soul less unquiet than mine, which is foundering." After a strained visit to Paris on July 1, Vincent grew more despondent about the burden he was placing on Theo: "Back here, I still felt very sad and continued to feel the storm which threatens you weighing on me too. . . I feared. . . that being a burden to you, you felt me to be rather a thing to be dreaded. . . ." Theo had informed Vincent that he and Jo and the child would soon take a vacation trip to Holland to show the child to Theo and Vincent's aged mother. Vincent suggested that instead of going to Holland they should come to Auvers for a rest in the country with him. His suggestion reflected a sincere concern for the health of Jo and the baby, as well as a deep and painful loneliness. He wrote them, "I fear that the journey to Holland will be the last straw for all of us."

It is possible that *Crows over the Wheat Field* was painted as a result of the loneliness and sadness which followed Theo's decision to go to Holland. In a letter which followed his trip to Paris, Vincent told Theo of setting to work on three large canvases, "though the brush almost slipped

from my fingers." He continued, "They are vast fields of wheat under troubled skies, and I did not need to go out of my way to try to express sadness and extreme loneliness." There is some disagreement, but Meyer Schapiro links this description with *Crows over the Wheat Field*.

Vincent's final letters became increasingly disorganized and reflected his doubts about himself and others. In a letter in late July Vincent suddenly told Theo, "I think we must not count on Dr. Gachet at all. . . .he is sicker than I am, I think, or shall we say just as much. . . .Now when one blind man leads another blind man, don't they both fall into the ditch?" John Rewald says that Vincent had had a violent argument with Gachet when he discovered that a painting by Guillaumin which he had greatly admired at the doctor's house had still not been properly framed as he had suggested. Besides losing faith in individuals, Vincent also lost faith in the community of artists, writing Theo on July 23, ". . . isn't the moment for trying to make them understand the usefulness of a union already gone? On the other hand a union, if it should take shape, would founder. . . ." In this same letter, which was written four days before he shot himself, Vincent tried and failed to express to Theo his overwhelming despair: "Perhaps I'd rather write you about a lot of things, but to begin with, the desire to do so has completely left me, and then I feel it is useless."

Frank Elgar expresses the opinion that *Crows over the Wheat Field* was painted after this letter of July 23 rather than at the earlier suggested time. This seems entirely feasible, if not probable, because in the letter of July 23, Vincent mentions sketches of two canvases he planned to do "representing vast fields of wheat after the rain." These two canvases quite possibly could have been *Crows over the Wheat Field* and a similar but less agitated one which is called *Field under Stormy Sky*. Vincent's last letter, which he wrote before he shot himself on July 27, and which was found in his pocket when he died on July 29, was his final disorganized and futile attempt to verbalize his affection for Theo in "a moment of comparative crisis." Here he attempted to thank Theo for his "part in the actual production of some canvases, which will retain their calm even in the catastrophe." The striking mixture of vitality and despair of *Crows over the Wheat Field* lends support to the idea that this

painting was done close to the time of suicide as Vincent's attempt to express to his brother and the world what he could not entirely communicate with words.

If *Crows over the Wheat Field* is indeed van Gogh's last painting, it concerns an appropriate subject, because from the very beginning Vincent was enthralled by the brilliance of the sun and the reflection of the sun which he saw in fields of wheat. Wallace Fowlie of the University of Chicago has stated the opinion that in his treatment of the sun and its brilliance, Vincent came close to being a member of the Symbolist movement, because the sun was his most intriguing motif and allegory. The glaring sun disc dominated numerous paintings, and even in paintings such as *Crows over the Wheat Field* where the disc is not depicted, one senses its presence and power in its reflection on the earth in fields of wheat.

In Paris in 1887 Vincent painted *A Wheat Field* which appears to be a rather sedate version of what was to become *Crows over the Wheat Field*. At Arles Vincent was intoxicated by the sun, painting bareheaded in order to imprison the brilliance and transpose it onto his canvases. Here where Vincent began painting flattened, shadowless objects whose light seemed to emanate with inner force, the sun became a material thing, the most vivid and intensely radiant object of all. It was at Arles in August, 1888, that Vincent began his series of panels of sunflowers, using bright yellows against deep blue backgrounds the color of the Provencal sky. The numerous Sunflowers seem to be an attempt to capture in a symbol the full radiance of the sun. Wheat too was continuing to become an important symbol for him at Arles, because here he began doing studies of reapers in yellow wheat fields, an image with which he was to continue to experiment at Saint Remy. A significant figure of speech which Vincent employed in a letter to Theo from Arles gives evidence of his fascination with wheat. He wrote that he was "caught in the wheels of the Fine Arts, like wheat between the millstones."

At Saint Remy Vincent painted numerous wheat-fields, but they were nearly always enclosed by stone walls, giving evidence, no doubt, to his own feelings of imprisonment. At the asylum Vincent copied many engravings, including Millet's "Reaper" and "Sower". He did many studies of reapers and wheat fields, and after painting a canvas in



September, 1889, which he simply entitled "Reaper", he wrote Theo that the study was in thick yellow and that "I see in him (the reaper) the image of death, in the sense that humanity might be the wheat he is reaping. . . . But there's nothing sad in this death, it goes its way in broad daylight with a sun flooding everything with a light of pure gold."

Auvers saw the culmination of Vincent's fascination with wheat. He began doing studies and numerous sketches of individual ears of wheat. He depicted wheat in the backgrounds of portraits, such as *Peasant Girl*, done in June, 1890. Large fields of glowing wheat had an ambiguous effect on him. On one hand, he saw "sadness and extreme loneliness" there, as suggested earlier. On the other hand, as he wrote his mother and sister, he found great calmness by being "quite absorbed in the immense plain with wheatfields against the hills, boundless as the sea. . . ." He also expressed to Theo the hope that his paintings of the wheat fields would tell him of the "health and restorative forces that I see in the country." Both feelings toward the wheat fields are expressed in the final painting, *Crows over the Wheat Field*, in which the vibrant sun disc of earlier paintings has seemingly come to earth.

In studying the painting itself, one must immediately come to terms with the color, which is certainly one of the most striking or impressive features. At Auvers Vincent continued the practice he had started at Arles of using arbitrary colors for expressive and symbolic purposes. Obviously the colors yellow, blue, red-brown, green, and black, which appear in the painting, were used with a specific expression in mind. Bright yellow and deep blue became Vincent's favorite colors when he was painting the *Sunflowers* series at Arles, as evidenced by a letter in August, 1888, in which he requested a new supply of the two colors, since he was exhausting his supply so rapidly. In *Crows over the Wheat Field* the yellow of the shimmering, windswept wheat seems to be the culmination of all the light, joy, and vitality that the earlier yellows had expressed, with the addition of an almost divinely intense glow. Blue, which Vincent used with growing frequency in later paintings, (such as *Starry Night*, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, and *Mademoiselle Ravoux*) is here not a flat, even color like the blue of Arles, but a more mysterious pulsing void. The blue of the sky over the wheat field seems to ex-

press a vast totality, an infinity like the night sky, or a deep and ultimate state of resolution. The soil and untrodden grass of the diverging, dead-end paths in the foreground of the picture are painted with the colors red and green. On September 8, 1888, at Arles, Vincent wrote Theo concerning the painting *Night Cafe*: "I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green." Later, writing from Saint Remy to his friend Bernard in December, 1889, he said in describing a large pine tree which had been struck by lightning, "You will realize that this combination of red-ocher, of green gloomed over by gray. . . produces something of the sensation of anguish, called *noir-rouge*, from which certain of my companions in misfortune frequently suffer." In painting the paths which lead nowhere in *Crows over the Wheat Field* with the predominate colors red and green, Vincent was expressing similar feelings. The black color of the endless progression of crows increases the feeling of despair and adds a note of forboding gloom.

Together, all these colors produce a striking visual effect. The contrast of deep blue and bright yellow makes each stand out in intensity. An important feature of the color is that instead of working with pure, flat colors as he did at Arles, Vincent here operated with variations of purity or a scale of intensity. This gives to the intensity of the color a struggling climactic effect, in which the most absolute shade is felt as a goal of the gradation. Such a use of color is obviously an effective expression of a turbid and passionate vitality.

The surface impasto style which became so expressive at Saint Remy here complements the color to produce the stirring effect. The agitated brush strokes which cover the canvas give a flickering motion to the wheat, as if it were being blown by strong winds. The brush strokes also cause both the earth and sky to seem to be imbued with violent inner forces. The manner in which the crows are applied gives them an erratic, stroboscopic, or nightmarish effect.

In spite of the intriguing surface effect, the spectator is immediately drawn into a complicated perspective. At Arles Vincent had begun flattening as Gauguin was doing, but perspective remained for him not a set of rules, but a viable means for the artist to relate to the real world. Vincent's earlier landscapes had seemed to emanate from his eyes with a continuous motion converging toward some

distant point or goal, such as the sun disc. In later works the flight to the goal usually became obstructed or unfulfilled, as exemplified by Landscapes with Plowed Fields painted at Saint Remy, in which the sun disc had been moved far to the right of the point of convergence. Meyer Schapiro has pointed out that in *Crows over the Wheat Field* the converging lines have fallen apart to become divergent paths, making movement to the horizon impossible. The result is a disquieting situation for the painter or spectator, who is powerless to reach the horizon on any of the paths, because they end blindly or run off the picture. The perspective network in the open field is now inverted, with the lines converging toward the foreground from the horizon, making space seem to have lost its proper and normal focus. At the same time, the triangular portions of the field of golden wheat enlarge as they recede toward the horizon. The spectator is at the vanishing point of the orthogonals and the rest of the picture seems to have turned aggressively upon him. Meanwhile, the crows advance in a zigzag formation which reflects the wavy form of the divergent paths. But the crows hold to natural perspective, enlarging as they come nearer. As Schapiro suggests, this coincides with their emotional enlargement as approaching harbingers of anxiety. They seem to bring to the picture a perspective of time in which the next moment is imminent and must inevitably come. The result of this mixture of inverted and normal perspective is that the artist's will seems to be confused or arrested by a situation which resists and defies the normal, rational control of perspective. The artist is blocked from moving into the field or toward the world, and at the same time, an ominous fate approaches.

The combination of all these elements of the composition is amazing. The vivid colors and agitated brush strokes unite the styles of Arles and Saint Remy in a painting which pulsates with life and force. The yellow and blue areas of color pull away from each other in contrast, but the crows (which, incidentally, seem to function symbolically in much the same fashion as Poe's raven) advance across both areas with a unifying effect. The rhythmical brush work also serves to unify the entire canvas. A subtle device for unification is the reflection of the paths in the formation of the crows, as well as in the two greenish-white clouds

in the sky near the horizon. Because of this unity, a painting which could be confused or complicated by a rather complex perspective system maintains simplicity of expression. The predominant horizontal quality of the painting, which lacks any verticals whatsoever, establishes a stable, earth-bound effect, and yet there is a definite and deliberate unity of the earth with the infinity of the blue sky.

*Crows over the Wheat Field* has a definite significance in terms of van Gogh's work as a whole. Besides the earlier mentioned advances in color gradation, brush work and perspective, the painting is also significant because it is a landscape. Although he had done landscapes throughout his career, Vincent had decided earlier to concentrate on portraiture which had declined in Impressionism. Deeply attached to humanity, he felt that the future of modern art lay in this field, and he proceeded to do fifty peasant heads in Holland and forty-six portraits in Arles, as well as numerous self-portraits. Hungering for friendship and affection he did portraits on free choice rather than commission, painting peasants, friends, and acquaintances such as the postman and zouave at Arles. At Saint Remy he began painting restless, tossing and tormented landscapes to express his own suffering and inner upheaval. This landscape style of coiling forms and complicated diagonals had been confined for several years to drawings and seemed to emerge in paintings only at the end as a powerful expression of strain and self-entanglement. Schapiro feels that Vincent's art developed out of the struggle of the two forms of human portraits and whirling landscapes, each of which were utilized with poignancy. Some people might wish to suggest that Vincent's final lapse into landscape with *Crows over the Wheat Field* is evidence of a final disenchantment with people or an acceptance that affection and communication would forever be impossible. Here it is best to listen to the words which Vincent wrote Theo close to his death concerning a portrait he had done: "I have noticed that this canvas goes very well with another horizontal one of wheat. . . .but we are still far from the time when people will understand the curious relation between one fragment of nature and another, which all the same explain each other and enhance each other. But some certainly feel it, and that's something."

It is possible to look at *Crows over the Wheat*



Field as a significant and influential point in modern painting. Certainly it exemplifies the major influences which van Gogh was to have on subsequent generations of artists. With its exaggeration of form and color in order to express an inner truth, this painting, as all the others, shows Vincent to be the father of the expressionist movement of the twentieth century. They, like Vincent, have sought to paint "with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize, and which we seek to convey by the actual radiance and vibration of our color." It is possible today to appreciate *Crows over the Wheat Field* for its abstract forms—its pure visual shapes—without regard for reality. Vincent was aware of abstraction and used the term to refer to flattened forms or forms painted from the imagination. Although he was too devoted to communicating reality and experience to consider abstraction as a form of art, it is possible to see paintings like *Crows over the Wheat Field* as a step toward abstract art. Furthermore, Vincent's impassioned use of brush strokes to express great agitation and force in this painting can be seen as a definite influence on American "action painters" such as Jackson Pollock.

Finally, *Crows over the Wheat Field* is a significant indication of the relation between

Vincent's personal life and his art. Some painters, such as Monet, could exclude their personal lives, aims and difficulties from their art to a great degree, but Vincent could not. A Dr. Daniel E. Schneider has attempted to psychoanalyze Vincent's work, saying that in his paintings he projected an unsatisfied eroticism, as well as masochism, neurosis and possible homosexuality onto all of nature. No matter how intriguing this sounds, it must remain in the realm of vague theory, because obviously the most important characteristic of the relation between Vincent's life and art is that art was an almost religious expression for him, synonymous with his earlier evangelical zeal. He expressed it thus to Theo: "I can very well do without God in both my life and painting, but I cannot, ill as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life—the power to create." This power to create remained with him in the midst of mental and physical anguish, even to the point of suicide. *Crows over the Wheat Field* is Vincent's creative expression of the meaning behind a statement he wrote to his brother about the suffering "which seen from here sometimes so fills the whole horizon that it takes on the proportions of a hopeless deluge." He said, "We know very little about this, about its proportions, and it is better to look at a wheat field, even in the form of a picture."

—Marilyn Brown



## TWO POEMS

Mirrored sun  
    in the white capped world  
        just beyond the land  
Reminds of another day  
    when salt water pools of yours  
Reflected what was above them.  
    The space between,  
        uncluttered with the dust of sunlite rooms,  
Seemed far too small  
    to hold a wedge.

In that time,  
    the beginning,  
We'd stay on the boat  
    all night  
Just to watch the sea-world morning.  
    The breakfast smells in your hair  
Were food for a whole day,  
    and the salt air wind  
        loving kelp green waves  
All the way to  
    a land of sea oats  
        and little children with pails and sunburn  
Was the only key I needed  
    to unlock a storm of gentle breezes.

A day was an hour then—  
    a lifetime now—  
To anchor with signs  
    and walk into the night with the moon.

The brown stalks lean toward the blood of day  
    I stay here; you've gone away.  
There once was a time when diamonds at night  
    Would shackle you within reach.  
Now night is cold as winter's dead trees  
    And to you I'm the same as all of these,  
Shells and wood, washed astray,  
    Frozen at night for want of day.

—Milton Spaulding





## STOPOVER

Nolan paused on the sidewalk beneath the sign that said: GREYHOUND BUS STATION. He had been thinking. . .he shook his head. What had he been thinking? He could not remember. He shrugged. No matter. He set his blue samsonite suitcase down on the hot concrete, squinted up at the summer sun, and reached into his jacket pocket to reassure himself that his return ticket was still there. It was a habit; he was always afraid that he might lose his ticket or miss his bus or board the wrong one. None of these disasters had ever happened to him before, but he never ceased to fear that he might be kept from reaching his destination. He remembered that if he missed the

bus today, he would never arrive back at college in time for registration. Something in the back of his mind told him that he would check his pocket many times later on to feel the thin, crumpled paper of the ticket.

He picked up his suitcase, pushed open a dingy glass door, and stepped into the terminal. As he did, he realized that something was wrong. But what was it? He did not know. Everything looked exactly the same as it always did. He was standing in a large room with walls of green tile and a yellow ceiling. From the ceiling, two air conditioners were suspended by heavy pipes. In the center of the room were tiers of wooden, back-

to-back benches upon which rested people and luggage. Across the room from him were four wooden doors with four dirty panes of glass. They led, Nolan knew, to the loading zones for the buses. On either side of the row of doors was a flank of pinball machines, and a dull yellow sign overhead proclaimed in black letters: USE OF PINBALL MACHINES BY PEOPLE UNDER 19 YEARS OF AGE FORBIDDEN BY LAW. A smaller, white sign underneath it was illegible from across the room, but Nolan knew that it declared that stealing luggage from buses was a federal offense.

On the wall to Nolan's right, he saw the windows to the ticket office and one take-your-own-photo booth. The wall on his left contained the rectangular opening into the baggage room and two telephone booths. On his own side of the room were two bathrooms and a counter that sold cokes, sandwiches, and movie magazines. A convex mirror, the only polished object in the terminal, glinted down at the counter.

There, he told himself. It was all as he remembered it, all perfectly normal. But he did not feel reassured. He picked a spot on a bench that was directly across from a black-haired girl wearing a blue pants suit. She was nursing a cream colored traveling kit in her lap. In the fingers of her right, upturned hand, attached to a limp wrist, she held a smoldering cigarette. Occasionally, with deliberate grace, she would put the cigarette to her lips and inhale deeply. Then, slowly, she would let her hand fall back to its original position. Nolan nodded to her slightly, then thrust his hand into his pocket to feel the ticket once more.

You could never be too careful. You could never be sure when the bus company would change the timetable on you. You could never be sure when the bus would come into the wrong zone. You could never hear what those damn announcers said over the Public Address system, it was always so garbled.

And suddenly Nolan knew what was wrong. He had heard no announcements since he had entered the building: no announcements of any departures, no summons for someone to report to the ticket office, no polite commands for the owner of a blue Ford to move it out of the loading zone. He looked around him. The grey trumpets of the PA system were there, all right, in each corner of the room. But they were all silent; they did not

even emit a crackle of static.

Nolan popped his knuckles nervously. This wasn't good at all. He rose and walked across the room toward the ticket office. Perhaps they could tell him what was the matter. Perhaps it was a malfunction or a short circuit or something. He noticed that the usual line in front of the ticket office was missing. Funny. He could not remember a time when there had been no line in front of the windows. As he neared the office, he could see no faces behind the windows. There was nobody there. He peered about to see if there was anybody in some back room, but he could not even see a door to a back room. He looked down at the floor behind the window, half expecting to see someone sprawled out on it. There was nothing except an exceptional layer of dirt, unmarked by any footprints.

Nolan took a deep breath and straightened up. He turned and walked toward the concession stand. They would know what was going on around here, surely. But he came to a halt. The sandwiches in their wrappers of wax paper, the red and blue pulls on the coke machines, filled with bright bubbling liquids, the stacks of True Confessions and Man's World, even the plastic pillows and toy buses were there. But nobody stood behind the counter. There was only the silver, implacable mirror, staring downward, to oversee any business.

Nolan licked his lips, then wiped the palm of his hand over his mouth. He tasted the salt of his own sweat. Everybody else seemed to be acting casually enough. Could it be that he was the only person in the station to sense that there was something wrong? Surely not. If there was really anything out of the ordinary, somebody else would have noticed it. Nevertheless, he found himself walking quickly toward the luggage room. He stuck his head through the opening and into the room. Luggage was piled high on half a dozen different carts. Each suitcase had a cardboard baggage tag on it. Over in one corner of the room was a heap of old army blankets. There was nobody in the room.

Nolan turned toward the four doors leading onto the loading zones. He forced himself to walk, not run, toward them. He clenched his teeth, peered through the windows. There were three other luggage carts outside, all empty and still. No bus stood in any of the zones. There was not so much as a car or a motorcycle to be seen, not even the cough or rumble of an engine to be heard. A brick wall, its mortar rough and

crumbling, stood at the other side of the zone, blocking out any sight of the rest of the city. The only sign of life that Nolan could discern was a flock of dirty grey pigeons, pecking at the surface of the zone. In a sudden movement, they rose, flapping, and dissappeared into a smoggy sky.

Nolan wanted to scream. Instead, he emitted a choked, croaking sound. He saw that his hands were shaking uncontrollably. He backed several paces away from the door and felt himself bump into somebody. He whirled and found himself facing a plump, bald-headed man wearing a brown suit. He held a briefcase in one hand, and a pair of horn-rimmed glasses were balanced on the tip of his nose as he stared contemptuously down at Nolan.

"Uh, excuse me," Nolan said.

The bald headed man emitted a faint but audible sniff.

"Look," Nolan said impulsively, motioning toward the loading zone, "could you tell me—"

"I think not," said the man. "I am rather busy at the moment." And he walked away, swinging his briefcase jauntily.

Nolan stared after him for a moment. Then he looked across the room and breathed a sigh of relief. A policeman was standing near the corner of the room, talking to a man seated on a bench. The cop was in his mid-forties, a heavy set man with muscles that were beginning to turn to fat. His iron-grey hair was in a crew cut. He could help, Nolan decided. He would know what to do.

As he approached the cop, Nolan saw that the man that he was talking to was a lanky Negro. wearing a T-shirt and faded blue jeans. A purple circle had been painted on the front of the T-shirt, apparently with water colors. The Negro was smiling foolishly, and Nolan was able to smell the liquor on his breath even before he reached the two men.

"All right, buddy," the cop said. "You're under arrest."

"That bourbon, it sure packs a wallop," the Negro said. He gave the cop a man-to-man smile. "Sure can git to you," he said.

The cop was not impressed. "Come on," he said. "Let's go." He grabbed the Negro by the arm and lifted him, unresisting, to his feet. He frisked the Negro quickly, and he pulled a bottle of Jack Daniels from out of the Negro's

hip pocket.

"Aw, you ain't really going to take me in, are you?" the Negro said plaintively. "I ain't been doing nothin'. I just been sittin' here. I ain't bothered nobody."

"That don't cut any ice," the cop grunted. "You're coming all the way downtown with me."

Nolan stepped forward and cleared his throat. "Excuse me," he said.

The cop turned around, setting the liquor bottle down on the bench. He glared suspiciously at Nolan, as though he were trying to spot a con man.

"Excuse me," Nolan said again, "but could you tell me where I could find out about any buses leaving here today?"

"Go over to the ticket window," said the cop. "That's what it's there for."

"But that's just it," Nolan said. "There's nobody over at the ticket window?"

"What're you talking about?"

"I mean that there's nobody at the window," said Nolan. "And I can't find anybody else who works here either. There's nobody selling food or loading baggage or making announcements. I thought that maybe you might know where they are."

The cop looked at Nolan for a long time, chewing his cud. "All right, buddy," he said at last. "Let me see your draft card."

Nolan shook his head in confusion. "What?"

"You heard me, buddy. Let me see your draft card." The cop paused. "You do got a draft card, don't you?"

The Negro peered over the cop's shoulder. "Hey," he said to the cop. "He drunk, too?"

"Naw," said the cop. "But if he don't have his draft card, he's gonna be in worse trouble than you."

"Son of a bitch," the Negro said, almost in awe. He picked the bottle up off the bench, took a swig, and then craned his neck over the cop's shoulder once more.

Nolan pulled his wallet from out of his pocket and handed it to the cop. The cop handed it back. "I don't want your wallet," he said. "Just your draft card."

Dazed, Nolan began to thumb through his wallet. He passed over four photographs, his social security card, his student I. D. card, his



insurance card, his library card, and a voter registration card. He realized that he had not seen his draft card. "Just a minute," he said. "I have it here somewhere. . ."

The cop waited impatiently. The Negro lost interest and faded into the background. Nolan began to rifle through his wallet again. He couldn't have lost it, he was sure. . . There! Triumphant, he handed the card to the cop. The cop studied it as though he were checking it for signs of forgery; but Nolan was somehow positive that he hadn't read a single word on the card. Finally, the cop handed it back.

"You're okay this time," he said to Nolan, "but watch yourself in the future."

Nolan had nodded and walked away before he realized that he still didn't know what had happened to everybody in the station. He sat down by his suitcase to think of his next step. He could think of nothing. He looked up and saw that the dark-haired girl was drawing her cigarette from her lips again. As she did, she gave him a slow and knowing smile. He smiled back, and then he looked around him.

Across the room, a boy with long yellow hair and bright orange bellbottoms lovingly gripped the flipper levers of a pinball machine decorated with paintings of busty girls playing baseball in tight, single-colored sweaters and miniskirts. There was a bing! bing! bing! bing!, and lights flashed above the pictures of the girls, indicating that the boy had just scored 665 points. The boy stroked the sides of the machine, fed another quarter into it, and caressed the levers once more, oblivious to all else in the room.

The score had reached 525 when a voice in front of Nolan said, "Brother, if you were to lie down in the coffin tonight, would you be ready?"

Nolan turned to look at a thin-faced man with curly black hair. He wore dark, threadbare trousers and a reddish vest of imitation leather. His shirt was solid white, open at the collar. He had his sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

"Are you prepared to hear the Word of the Lord?" asked the man. He handed Nolan a tiny pamphlet entitled: **FOUR WAYS TO SALVATION**. The cover displayed a sketch of a cross, dwarfing a crowd of people at its foot, from which rays of light were emanating. Nolan flicked the pages, pretending to skim the book.

"If you only beg forgiveness for your sins," Nolan heard the man say, "you will never have to

rear me grave. Jesus Christ will enter your heart and refresh your spirit, and save you from eternal damnation."

Nolan stared at him.

"Kneel down with me, brother," said the man, dropping to his knees. "Kneel down with me here on the floor, and we will pray to the Lord together."

"I'm sorry," Nolan said. "I'm an agnostic."

The thin faced man assimilated this information.

"Oh," he said. He rose and approached the next man down on the bench. "Brother," he said to him, "if you were to lie down in the coffin tonight, would you be ready?"

The black-haired girl was still smiling. Now she began to stretch, her arms lifting upwards, her booted feet sliding across the floor toward Nolan. At that moment, he remembered the telephones. He was surprised that he hadn't thought of them before. He rose and started to walk toward the phone booths. As he passed by the pinball machines, the yellow-haired boy turned to him. "Mister," he whispered, "can I borrow a quarter, please? I've used my last quarter, and I've got to play one more game." His eyes were haunted and desperate. "Can you loan me the quarter?" Suddenly, his hand gripped Nolan's arm like a manacle. "My God, mister, you've got to let me have that quarter!"

Nolan hastily pulled out his change purse and handed the boy a quarter. The boy seized it greedily, and then he relaxed. Wordlessly, he turned to the machine, eased the quarter into the slot, and began to play.

Nolan slipped into one of the phone booths and closed the door, sealing all the sounds of the terminal outside. It was like a tomb, he thought. Like a glass tomb. He deposited a dime, heard it clatter and click inside the phone. There was no dial tone. He dialed "O" anyway. There was no response. He jiggled the hook of the phone. Still nothing. Nolan swore, took another dime from his change purse, and tried once again. The phone was dead. He slammed the phone back on the hook, pushed out of the booth, and stepped into the second booth. He slipped a third dime into the phone, got no dial tone, reached out with his index finger to dial. . . And stopped. If somebody answered, what would he say? He realized with a shock that he did not know. He let the phone drop from his fingers and dangle on its cord. He slowly stepped out of the booth. The thin-faced man approached him. "Brother," he said, "if you were—

Oh. I've seen you before." He turned and scurried off after a new convert.

What could he tell anybody? Who would listen to him? "I am the only one who sees," he said softly, to himself. "I am the only one who knows. Nobody can tell me what is wrong, because nobody knows that anything is wrong." He began to shake, helpless with fear. Then helpless fear turned to helpless rage. "God damn you all!" he shouted. "You're all a bunch of God damned jackasses!"

Nobody answered, or even looked in his direction. Anger gave way to amusement. Why, what was he so upset about? Why should he worry? Nolan leaned against the phone booth, convulsed with laughter. "Why, you're nothing but a bunch of zombies," he murmured. "Zombies!" he roared for the benefit of the crowd. There was no response.

Nolan shrugged and walked over to the concession stand. He selected two ham and cheese sandwiches and served himself a Coke. He seated himself on the counter and looked up at the ever-watchful mirror, examining his reflection as he chewed on the sandwiches. When he had finished, he selected half a dozen magazines and scooped them up. He thumbed through them for a while, and when he was finished, he tossed them on the floor. He considered emptying the cash register, but he decided that it could wait.

The cop was across the room, frisking the blond-haired boy. Nolan moved back toward the benches and seated himself beside the dark-haired girl. He put his arm around her. She leaned against him, her head on his shoulder.

"Where?" she said.

Nolan thought for a moment. "The luggage room," he decided. They rose, and she moved easily with him toward the opening in the wall. The thin-faced man trotted toward them.

"Sister," he said to the girl, "if you—"

"She's an agnostic, too," Nolan said.

"Oh." The thin-faced man stepped aside to let them step through the opening in the wall.

They walked over to the pile of army blankets near the wall. Still smiling, the girl began to remove her pants suit. Nolan took a step toward her. She looked ever better than he'd thought. The smile turned to a grin, and, as she pulled Nolan down on the blankets, the grin turned to a leer.

Nolan did not remember sleeping or waking but after a while, he became aware that he was

lying on the blanket by himself. He decided to go to the bathroom. He dressed, went over to the opening, and stepped out. The cop neared him. "I'm going to get you, buddy," he said. "Sooner or later, you're going to slip, and then I'll nail you."

Nolan ignored him and entered the bathroom door marked: GENTLEMEN. The opposite wall of the room was lined with pay toilets. The room was blue with cigarette smoke. Near him, in a corner, was a shoeshine stand, surrounded by half deformity: a missing eye, a missing hand, a burn on the face, a hunched back, a mangled foot, and a twisted leg. The Negro, still clutching his bottle, was sitting on the shoeshine stand. One of the men, the man with the twisted leg, snickered and nudged the others as Nolan entered.

Nolan crossed the bathroom. He paused for a moment, raised his foot, and kicked a door to the toilet stall. The door tore free of the lock and swung open. When he came out, the man with the twisted leg, who was wearing a cowboy hat, said to the Negro, "That's the one! That's the son of a bitch that was talking about you. If it was me, I'd kill him."

The other men rumbled their agreement.

"Haven't got nothin' to kill him with," the Negro said.

"Here," cowboy-hat said solemnly. He handed the Negro a switchblade. "Glad to loan it."

There was a murmur of approval from the others.

The Negro focussed his eyes on Nolan. "Gonna kill you," he said thickly.

"That's telling him!" cried cowboy-hat. "Put it to him!"

"Gonna put it to you," said the Negro. "Gonna kill your guts."

"All right," said Nolan, "you asked for it."

He carefully circled the Negro. Then, suddenly, he whirled and charged cowboy-hat. He kicked him in the groin, punched him twice, slammed his head against the wall. The man collapsed to the floor, unconscious.

There was a sudden silence as the other five cripples tried to recover from their shock. The Negro stared stupidly at the switchblade in his hand, unsure of what to do. Nolan picked up the bottle of bourbon from the shoeshine box and walked out the door.

He paused long enough to finish the bottle. It tasted terrible. He threw the bottle on the floor, watched it shatter into a million glittering fragments. He walked over to his bench. The girl was no longer sitting there; she was leading the bald-headed man toward the trunkroom.

Nolan curled back his lip. "Zombies."

He picked up his suitcase and walked toward the entrance to the station. He tugged at the door; it would not open. By God, if it didn't open, he'd kick the glass right out of the frame. . .

The door pulled free. Nolan stepped outside, into the sunlight. He laughed aloud. Damn, it was good to escape from. . .

Escape from what? He shook his head. He could not remember. Everything was rapidly fading from his memory. He set the suitcase down on the sidewalk and squinted up at the sun. He did recall that there was something wrong inside the terminal, something very wrong. Something that he'd wanted to get away from.

And then he remembered something else. "I was the only one who knew," he said in astonishment. "I was the only one who ~~was~~ even suspected. All of the others were ignorant." He looked back uncertainly at the door. Absently, he reached into his pocket and felt his ticket. He nodded his head, his mind made up. He picked up his suitcase, took two steps toward the station, and stopped. He hoped that he could remember what it was that he alone knew. He was not sure that he would succeed. He shrugged and pushed the glass door open.

He stepped inside.

—Paul Camp



## THE MAN WHO HAD NOTHING TO SELL

The subject of our story is Mr. Draco Lebanq: tall, dark, and handsome. . .tall, dark, and brilliant. . .tall, dark, and mysterious. All of these qualities are of interest, but they are of secondary importance to another trait. This trait is as follows: Draco Lebanq can take the useless, the crackpot, the haphazard, and he can make them become priceless. Rockefeller, Getty, and DuPont are pikers in comparison to Mr. Lebanq. Midas would have envied him.

Why not see what we mean? Take some pollution, mixed at random from seven different chemical factories into the seawater off Frisco Bay. Draco Lebanq took it, and he came up

with a cure for lung cancer. Or take a fifth rate example of modern art, with flashing lights and mirrors, and turning gears and wheels. Draco Lebanq did, and he produced a new rocket stabilizer from it. Or what about a maze of tinker toys, fashioned by a ten-year-old idiot? Draco Lebanq used this as the model for a ten million dollar skyscraper.

Perhaps you could have done these things yourself, if you had only thought of them. But you are not Draco Lebanq; you did not think of them. Draco Lebanq is the man who buys and sells anything to anybody at any time. And that is why we are concerned with Draco Lebanq,

not yourself, and what was probably the strangest of his transactions.

One day, Mr. Draco Lebanq entered the dingy hallway of an apartment building in Queens. He paused for a moment while he pulled the medical dogtag labeled EPILEPSY from his neck. The edge of the tag was carefully filed into a jagged unevenness. Mr. Lebanq fitted the tag into the keyhole of room 328 and twisted it. The lock snicked; he stepped inside. He picked the most comfortable chair in the room, sat down, and waited.

He waited precisely two minutes, thirty-five point five seconds. A key fumbled in the lock, and then a shaggy-haired man, dressed in grey, coffee-and-catsup-stained coveralls entered. The man's eyes widened slightly.

Draco Lebanq rose. "Thomas Smith?" he asked crisply.

"Uh. . ." Even as the man started to speak, Mr. Lebanq felt an unmistakable wave of boredom. Time to act—now! He raised his right arm slightly, and a derringer shot out of the pneumatic holster strapped to his forearm. It went smack! as it hit the palm of his hand and phut! as it fired a hypno dart into Smith's neck. Mr. Lebanq waited until he was sure that the drug on the needle had had time to circulate in Smith's bloodstream, and then he approached the still-standing man. The boredom was fading away now. Good.

"Come with me," said Draco Lebanq, and Thomas Smith did just that. He accompanied Draco Lebanq out of the apartment building and into a shiny new Mercedes. He rode with Mr. Lebanq across town to the airport, and then he flew in Mr. Lebanq's private helicopter to his chateau in the Swiss Alps. Mr. Lebanq led Smith through a heavy vault door in the basement of the chateau and into a laboratory.

Mon Dieu! And what a laboratory! Each of the four walls was a solid bank of computers, EKG machines, celsium clocks, laser communicators, radar pickups, and nuclear generators. Even the ceiling was a mass of machinery. The smooth metal floor caught and merged the images of the walls and ceiling into a jumble of tapes, consoles, graphs, grills, switches, screens, and lights. In the far right corner of the laboratory was a booth with a padded chair inside.

The two men crossed the room in the direction of the booth. There was no sound except the faint ring of their footsteps, the soft hum of a closed circuit, and the discreet click of a relay. Thomas Smith was led into the booth and strapped into the chair. Mr. Lebanq then produced a syringe and gave Smith a fresh dosage of drugs.

"Ah!" said Draco Lebanq. "Now we can talk, although you cannot comprehend what I am saying, and although you would not understand even if you were not drugged. Do you know why I brought you here?"

"No," said Thomas Smith dully.

"Ah!" said Draco Lebanq again. "Well, then, I will tell you. It is because you are a zero, a null, a nothing. Do you understand? No, of course not," he said before Smith could answer. "I will tell you more, then. Most people have positive or negative qualities about them that attract or repel others. Intelligence, for example. Loyalty. Honesty. Diligence, kindness, generosity. Some people have a high positive intelligence rating and a high negative honesty rating. Some have much loyalty, little kindness, hey?"

Mr. Lebanq paused and beamed for a moment, and then he pressed on. "However, you are a rare case, indeed. You are not intelligent, neither are you a moron. You are not kind, but you are not cruel. You are not loyal, but you are not treacherous. You are neither admirable nor pitiable. In short, you are a neutral person in every respect. A zero. A nothing. Pfui."

Mr. Lebanq lit a Havana cigar, puffed on it furiously for a moment, then gestured wildly with it. "But, hot damn! What makes you like this, eh? What makes you a man without any positive or negative values? What?"

Thomas Smith remained silent.

"I'll tell you what! Psi. ESP. Brain waves. You subconsciously project a neutral field or aura around you so that nobody near you cares about you. At the same time, you are a telepathic receiver, sensitive to what others think or feel. Their attitudes toward you are mentally received by your subconscious, and these attitudes dictate your actions. They are indifferent to you; consequently, you become indifferent, neutral."



"I call it the zero effect. A remarkable means of survival, even if you are not aware of it. Nobody gives a corn-cob for you, but nobody cares enough to bother you. Example: I almost died of boredom when I first saw you. If I had paused just a few seconds longer, I would never have been able to shoot you with the dart. I would have lost interest in you completely. Only the narcotic numbing your mind right now prevents you from projecting your aura and defeating me."

Draco Lebanq stuck the cigar back in his mouth and clamped down on it with gold-capped incisors. "It was risky. But as it happens, you are a valuable commodity to me. One should be willing to take certain risks for valuable commodities. Now, to work!"

From a compartment in the booth, Draco Lebanq drew out and pulled on a pair of rubber gloves. He then pulled out a bottle of some sticky white fluid which looked like latex (but which wasn't), and poured it onto Smith's head. He scrubbed the fluid into the hair, and it lathered up. When he rubbed the lather off, Thomas Smith's hair came off with it.

"Ho, baby!" Mr. Lebanq said. "Lovely. Magnifique! So much for the depilatory. Now I fasten on the electrodes. Three Westinghouse 700's, glass insulated. Hot damn!" Once the electrodes were on Smith's head, Mr. Lebanq reached up to where nine wires dangled down from the ceiling of the booth. He touched two of the wires together. Flash! Crackle! "Zut Alors!" swore Mr. Lebanq. "Son of a bitch! The thing works!" He attached three wires to each electrode, stepped out of the booth and flipped seven switches on the wall.

Listen, that machinery really got cracking! A million circuits closed, thirty graphs began to squiggle patterns, eight thousand punch cards were sorted out, pulses of light blipped on ten different screens in five different colors. Sixty-two seconds later, right on the nose, a typewriter at one end of the room began to clatter out information. When it stopped, Mr. Lebanq leaped across the laboratory and snatched the printed paper out of the typewriter. He read it rapidly once, and then he read it slowly a second time.

"Sea and biscuits," he murmured, almost

in awe. "I have done it. I have found a way to sell a man's absolute vacancy. Ha! My masterpiece! But who to sell it to? That's the question, eh, what? The Americans? No. The British? The Russians? No. Nyet. They were all my last clients. Must have a balance of power. A change of pace. Who, then?" Draco Lebanq paused and squinted. "Ho! The Chinese! Of course! I'll sell to the Chinese this time!"

And so Draco Lebanq sent a long, coded message to Benny the Fence in Naples, who relayed it to Harry Yoto in Hong Kong, who passed it on to a most anonymous man in Peking, who sent it to the headquarters of the notorious Dragon's Fang in that same city.

Four days later, Colonel Sen Ki Lee of the Dragon's Fang arrived at the chateau of Mr. Lebanq. Colonel Lee was five feet tall, with the build of a sumo wrestler. He had close-cropped black hair and the face of a gambler in a card game. He wore no uniform; rather, he was dressed in a neatly pressed charcoal grey suit and a plain white shirt. On his black silk tie was a tie clip in the shape of a water demon. He looked very much out of place in Mr. Lebanq's lounge, with its wine-red carpeting and tapestry, its plush sofas, and its polished mahogany tables.

However, when Mr. Lebanq entered the room, he showed no sign of noticing anything unusual about his guest. "Ah!" he beamed. "Welcome, Colonel, welcome!"

Colonel Lee pressed the palms of his hands together and bowed to Mr. Lebanq. "I am humbled," he said. He straightened up. "You have a proposition, I believe."

"Yes indeed, Colonel. Stagnation! Did you not get my report on Thomas Smith? Did I not tell you my findings?"

"I did. You did. But I fail to see how this extrasensory perception that you speak of could be of any interest to my organization. Indeed, if it were not for your reputation, Mr. Lebanq, I would not have come."

Draco Lebanq widened his eyes. "But—hot damn!—is it not obvious? Your organization is concerned with espionage, no? Spies, sleeper agents, undercover men? Ah! Well then, I have here a tool for you. Consider: I have a man—"

Mr. Lebanq poured himself a glass of Bordeaux '39—"who survives by being nothing, by projecting a neutral aura around him, n'est pas? Hokay. Now, what if this force could be harnessed, hah? What if your agents had such a force? What would happen then?"

Colonel Lee hesitated. "I am listening."

"I'll tell you what would happen!" cried Draco Lebanq. "They would be ignored completely. No counterespionage agency would detect them. They would never be caught! Never! Hoot mon, is that not valuable?"

"You have been able to harness this null-force?"

"I most certainly have. Shall I tell you how it works?"

"Please do."

Mr. Lebanq took a long, slow sip of his wine. "Well. Speaking in general terms, I have made a map, a recording of Thomas Smith's mind. From this recording, I have made a machine that can implant certain parts of this mind—the parts that project the aura and receive the reaction of others—onto the mind of another person. Much like a transplant, do you see?"

"Now. Let us suppose that you wish to send an agent on an undercover mission. We will say he is to take some photographs. With this machine I have developed, you program the agent's mission into his subconscious, to be activated as soon as he leaves on his mission. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

"Good! Good!" Draco Leganq finished the last of his wine. "Now, the agent does not consciously know that he is on a mission. Nor does he consciously know that he is projecting an aura and receiving the mental attitudes of others. He will be, in effect, every bit as dull and useless as Thomas Smith. But when the proper moment arrives, he will take the pictures that he was sent to take. When he returns from his mission, the programming is automatically erased, and he will remember everything that he did on the mission. Useful, no?"

"And what if he is discovered during his mission?" protested Colonel Lee. "He will not know that he is an agent; he will not be able to protect himself."

"He will not be discovered," said Mr. Lebanq. "However, if the agent's life is placed

in jeopardy, he will instantly come out of his programmed state. Even if he were hopped up on drugs like Thomas Smith is now, he would be able to throw off their effect on him. An insurance factor. My invention."

A pause. "I see. How do you plan to demonstrate your programming device to me?"

"I do not plan to demonstrate the machine," said Mr. Lebanq. "You must buy it sight unseen, with my word that it works. Caveat emptor."

A longer pause. "Very well. In light of your reputation, I am willing to take a chance. At what price do you wish to start negotiations?"

"There will be no negotiations. There is a set price. Two million credits for the machine. Another million for Thomas Smith. My terms."

"They are agreeable. We will take the machine. We do not need Thomas Smith."

"Oh so? But Thomas Smith is the raw material for the machine. The original model, as it were. There is nobody else quite like him. Possession of Thomas Smith insures a monopoly on the machine. Do you not see?"

"I see." Thoughtfully: "Very well. We will take both the programming machine and Thomas Smith."

"Bon! You will please transfer the money to the Franz Goffling Bank in Geneva under my account."

"We will want the programming system and Mr. Smith first."

"Hein? Quoi? No, no, no! This cannot be. My metal detectors tell me that you have a .22 magnum under your left armpit. My communications monitors tell me that you have a radio transmitter in your wrist watch. Also, my chemical detectors show indications of a thermite bomb in your pen and of cyanide gas in your cigarette lighter. If I should release either the programming machine or Thomas Smith from my laboratory vault before being paid, you would surely kill me. Cave canum."

"However, you sly old dog, I have taken precautions. If payment is not made to my bank in exactly one half hour, six charges of TNT will ignite in my vault, disposing of the computers, Smith, and the entire top of this mountain. You will never be able to break into the vault in time."

Colonel Lee hesitated, then held his watch up to his mouth. "Deposit the money," he said into the radium dial. Five minutes later, the

video-phone buzzed. A man dressed in a banker's dark brown suit appeared on the screen and said, "The deposit has been made, Herr Lebanq."

"Thank you, Diedrick," said Draco Lebanq. He pressed a button hidden under a mahogany table and turned to Colonel Lee. "The explosives have been disarmed." He spoke into an intercom. "Thomas Smith," he ordered, "bring the programming machine upstairs."

Moments later, Smith entered the lounge, carrying an attache case.

"Is that it?" Colonel Lee was astounded.

"Yes, indeed," said Draco Lebanq. "It is very compact, hey? Would you like to examine it?"

"Please," said Colonel Lee, bowing.

"Take the programming machine over to Colonel Lee. Colonel Lee is a nice man, isn't he?" said Draco Lebanq to Smith. Smith crossed the lounge and handed the attache case to Colonel Lee.

"By the by," Mr. Lebanq said to Colonel Lee, "I put some drugs in with the unit. Thomas Smith must be kept under sedation regularly."

"No need," said Colonel Lee absently as he opened the case. "Shortly after I leave, I will have no use for Thomas Smith. He will meet with a regrettable, but fatal accident."

Suddenly, Smith's left hand jabbed in a Kung Fu spear thrust to Colonel Lee's solar plexus. As Colonel Lee doubled up, gasping, Smith's right hand chopped down to the nape of his neck, once, twice, slamming Colonel Lee's face onto an upraised left knee. Before Mr. Lebanq could react, Smith had pulled Colonel Lee's .22 magnum out of its shoulder holster and had swung it around to bear on Mr. Lebanq.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Mr. Lebanq. "God damn! A fly in the ointment! But what does it all mean?"

"I'm surprised that you didn't foresee such a complication," said Smith dryly. "You recognized the existence of a null-ESP force. You were able to observe that I had such a force. You realized that, used properly, this null-aura would be useful in espionage. You even designed a way to use it. Did it never occur to you that I myself might have been a spy, just like your hypothetical agent? Did you never dream that the moment my life was threatened that I, too, could overcome my programming and your drugs?"

"A spy? But, holy damn spit! What nation or organization on earth has developed such a process?"

"None, Mr. Lebanq," said Smith calmly. "You are the first man to have discovered the phenomenon, and you are the first man to realize its use."

"Then how can—"

"I said that you were the first man, Mr. Lebanq. On Earth, Mr. Lebanq. I am not a man. I do not come from Earth. I was sent by the Arcturian Empire to investigate the possibilities of taking over this planet. I will be happy to report that it can be accomplished with relatively few complications."

Thomas Smith gave the semblance of a smile. "But, of course, before I can turn in that report, I must be assured that nobody will warn Earth of our coming."

His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Hot damn," said Draco Lebanq.

David Paul Camp





## THE WAPSHOTS OF ST. BOTOLPHS

John Cheever's Wapshot Chronicle has been called the most amusing novel of the sixties by more than one critic. Episodic in its construction, the novel is an intimate treatment of the foibles and values of the Wapshot family, beginning with Cousin Honora who supports the family but refuses to pay income tax, Leander who wishes to pass on to his sons the lesson of the past, his wife Sarah who opens a gift shop in the ruins of Leander's boat, and including the halting efforts of Moses and Coverly toward sex and marriage.

Although its purpose is to amuse, The Wapshot Chronicle presents a considerable argument for the existence of a definite New England culture, at

least the Wapshot brand of it. It is well known that most sociologists and literary critics deny that enduring culture or life-style was ever formulated in New England, excepting that covered by the watchwords Efficiency, Honesty, and Toil. Cheever uses the figure of Leander and his love of the past to emphasize a definite and regional code of existence. At times, Cheever's characters appear to be mere eccentrics; but one concludes that being a Wapshot requires living within the confines of a traditional code.

The Wapshots arrived in New England in 1630, and various descendants began establishing a "tradition of thoughtful regret." First, Ezekiel

Wapshot refused a post in the Royal Government. Having refused a decoration from the hands of General Washington, his grandson Nestor advanced the tradition, aware that "to be conspicuous—to be a hero—might entail some untoward financial responsibilities." (p. 10) Considering the refusal of anything a mark of character, the Wapshot women ate like birds when away from home; but back "in their own bailiwick, of course, they ate like wolves." (p. 10) On the other hand, the Wapshot men wrote copious journals in which "they urged themselves to improve their minds and they reproached themselves for idleness, sloth, lewdness, stupidity and drunkenness." (p. 11) However, they were not unusually prudish men but were constantly assailed by "swineish passions." (p. 13) While these lusty people concerned themselves with living in keeping with their heritage and code, some wrote intricate journals about the events of St. Botolphs or refused to pay taxes; all were quite busy being Wapshots.

The Wapshot culture culminates in Captain Leander Wapshot, the living embodiment of his family's past and its code. Leander desired to transmit to his sons, Coverly and Moses, his knowledge of the past and the meaning of the Wapshot heritage.

His blood teeming with that of sea captains, senators, scholars, and heros, Leander's own situation approaches pathos. Reduced to running a pleasure launch and being supported by Cousin Honora, Leander feels somewhat put upon by the twentieth century. Things were simpler in his youth. He reminds his son Coverly that there were homosexuals in St. Botolphs in his youth, and that such problems were solved with considerably more grace and practicality. In spite of his financial dilemma and his prejudices, Leander maintains faith in life and goes on living up to the Wapshot code. His awareness of the past glories of his family, as well as present failures, is made clear by his journal:

"Roofs of St. Botolphs in distance. Old river-bottom burg today. Family prominent there once. Name memorialized in many things in vicinity; lakes, roads, hills even. Wapshot Avenue now back street in honkytonk beach

resort further south. . . Matchwood cottages for rent by day, week or season. Such a street named after forebear who rode spar in Java sea for three days, kicking at sharks with bare feet." (p. 97)

Nothing makes clearer Leander's divorce from the present than his attitude toward the *Topaze*, his forty passenger launch. The boat is an old one and is hardly seaworthy; yet it is Leander's pride. It is the *Topaze* that leads to a bitter quarrel with Cousin Honora. Like all the things Leander owns, the *Topaze* belongs to Honora who threatens to close it down to insure that Moses be sent off to make his mark. Moses goes off, and Leander remains in charge of the ship. Later after the boat has sunk, his wife turns the wreck into a floating gift shop, to Leander's considerable consternation. Leander, like his boat, is almost pushed into the past. Neither have any real function in the present, but they both attempt to prolong their usefulness.

Like Leander, Cousin Honora lives according to the Wapshot heritage and code. Her cook recognizes in her some "naked force, quite apart from dependence and love." (p. 39) Doubtless, so do the residents of St. Botolphs, for they put up with the eccentric old woman. Honora pays no income tax, burns her letters unopened, and plunges her arm into tanks of unpegged lobsters, all in an effort "to cast off the claims of life the instant they are made." (p. 39) Grieved by the sight of Moses, her nephew and heir, dallying with Rosalie, an accident victim staying with the Wapshots, Honora creeps out of the house unseen, goes home, and says over and over, as if to make the event comprehensible: "I am Honora Wapshot. I am a Wapshot. I am Honora Wapshot. I am a Wapshot." (p. 76)

Early in her youth, Honora had married a Spanish noble who promised her a castle in Spain. Eight months later, she returned to St. Botolphs, despising forever anything foreign or out of the ordinary. Honora spent the rest of her days doing good works, enjoying her whimsies, and supporting Leander's family.

It is during Leander's funeral arrangements that Honora displays her "Wapshotness" to its

finest advantage. She instructs Moses and Coverly to reserve the chapel instead of the church, since all of Leander's friends are dead. Also she tells them to persuade the rector to read Prospero's speech at the funeral. Both these requests are refused by the rector. To Honora's surprise and satisfaction, the church is filled. Also she corrects the rector in mid-service by telling him that Wapshots always had Corinthians read at funerals, not St. John. Later at the grave side, Honora pushes Coverly forward and makes him say the speech Leander wanted.

Although The Wapshot Chronicle is extremely witty and, for the most part, well written, the book has several structural flaws. The plot is episodic, but the various elements of the plot are often unconvincingly fused. It is only by returning to Leander and his journal that any unity is achieved.

Because of the emphasis placed on Leander, Moses and Coverly suffer as characters. Although they are treated at sufficient length, their characters never quite gel. One reads the sections of the book rapidly that deal exclusively with Moses and Coverly, in order to get back to St. Botolphs, Leander, and Cousin Honora. It is unfortunate that Coverly and Moses are not more like Leander and Honora. In spite of their various troubles with wives and sweethearts, the two boys hardly reach the scope of their father and aunt. In fact, their characters are hardly realized until they leave St. Botolphs. Of the two, Moses is the most successfully developed character. However, one does feel that they grasp the final lesson of Leander when they find his note in the volume of Shakespeare:

"Fear tastes like a rusty knife and do not let her into your house. Courage tastes of blood. Stand up straight. Admire the world. Relish the love of a gentle woman. Trust in the Lord." (p. 307)

Another structural problem occurs near the beginning of the book. One wonders why a minor character like Rosalie is given such extensive development. Yet one whole chapter and large parts of succeeding chapters are devoted to Rosalie. After her parents come to St. Botolphs to claim her, no further mention is made of her.

To a lesser extent, one might question Cheever's characterization of Justina Wapshot Molesworth Scaddon, the dimstore empress. The reader is treated to her eccentricities and her curious way of life, but these foibles are not sufficiently explained. In contrast to Leander and Honora, Justina does not seem to be functioning as a Wapshot. She is, at best, a continental version of a Wapshot; but she seems to lack any of the good qualities of the other Wapshots. However, she is a minor character, and, perhaps, Cheever did not find it to his purposes to make her a more understandable character.

The majority of The Wapshot Chronicle's faults probably grow out of the fact that the material was first published as a series of short stories in The New Yorker. Since the novel was originally conceived as short story material, Cheever can be excused some of the faults of the novel. Naturally the material would tend to be a little disunified. Too, it excuses the weaknesses in the characterizations of Coverly and Moses, who could function well in the short story form but not perfectly in the novel.

The chief asset of The Wapshot Chronicle is its humor which is not confined to the St. Botolphs chapters but is spread throughout the book. Cheever is at his best in Leander's journal and in scenes dealing with Cousin Honora, such as their conversation the day before the Topaze is to be opened as a gift shop:

"Would you like some whiskey?" Honora asked.

"Yes, please," Leander said.

"There isn't any," Honora said. "Have a cookie."

"Feel that refreshing breeze," she said.

"Yes," Leander said. (There was no breeze at all.)

"Sit in the other chair," she said.

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you," Leander said.

"Sit in the other chair," Honora said. "I've just had it reupholstered. Although," she said as Leander obediently changed from one chair to the other, "you won't be able to see out of the window from there and perhaps you were better off where you were." (pp. 198-199)



Cheever is at his best in the first section of the book, in which he describes an Independence Day parade and some of the inhabitants of St. Botolphs. There is Reba Heaslip, the anti-vivisectionist also dedicated to the suppression of Christmas festivities. Nailed to her door is the legend: THIS IS THE HOUSE OF A VERY OLD LADY WHO HAS GIVEN THE LAST TEN YEARS OF HER LIFE TO THE ANTIVIVISECTIONIST CAUSE. MANY OF HER FAMILY DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY. THERE IS NOTHING OF VALUE OR INTEREST HERE. SALUTE YOUR FLAG! ROBBERS AND VANDALS PASS BY! (PP. 18-19) In a more earthy vein, there is Aunt Adlaide Forbes who tells of finding an unusually shaped carrot in her garden and taking it to Reba Heaslip:

"I don't know how to say it--this carrot was the spit and image of Mr. Forbes' parts. . . I wrapped this unusual carrot up in a piece of paper and took it right over to Reba Heaslip. She's such an old maid I thought she'd be interested. She was in the kitchen so I give her this carrot. That's what it looks like, Reba, I said. That's just what it looks like." (p. 30)

In spite of making certain structural faults, John Cheever has created a compelling portrait of the Wapshots and others in their region. The novel has two exceptionally fine characters: Leander and Cousin Honora. Also it has an excellent array of supporting characters. Its wit alone is sufficient to have merited the National Book Award.

—Roger Walker

John Cheever, The Wapshot Chronicle (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) p. 10. All other reference to the work will be to this edition and will be indicated by page number.



**Wind Wealth** (A Song for Carl Sandburg)

I sing to you (Carl Sandburg)  
lover of the night breeze  
in midwest apple  
trees,  
Knower of the wind,  
Free miser, lecherous and rich,  
Who piles his wind wealth  
high, in tattered stacks,  
along drug-store curbs  
and church-yard banks.

I walk tonight and  
sing silently to you,  
"Who . . .  
"Who. . .  
"Who. . .are. . .you?"

As I kick the leaves  
turning Thomas Wolfe tumbles,  
Blowing down brown alleys,  
Beneath struggling trees  
(If the daylight puffs, carresses be,  
Tonight the wind sticks out its tongue in lust.)  
it grasps the trees;  
Moaning and shaking;  
Wind-assaulted;  
Throwing off their old  
garments in ecstasy.

Tonight the wind has a  
forest of lovers.

—Jimmy Griffin

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